



## **A NEW ERA OF OPEN-WHEEL RACING DAWNS AT THE GRAND PRIX OF ST. PETERSBURG WITH THE STAR MAZDA CHAMPIONSHIP AND THE 'ROAD TO INDY' MAKING ITS IRL DEBUT**

St. Petersburg, FL / March 22, 2010 -- To the international cast of rising open-wheel racing stars that comprise the grid of the 2010 Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear, high-



speed, wheel-to-wheel racing in front of huge crowds through the concrete canyons of a street circuit is not a novel experience; the Star Mazda Championship schedule includes a well-rounded selection of street circuits, road courses and ovals. And this is the college varsity of IndyCar racing, so by the time a driver reaches this level they are seasoned veterans of a hundred green flags and the rush of adrenaline that comes with it.

What makes this weekend's Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg something significant in the world of open-wheel racing in North America is that this is the first time all of the series that comprise the Indy Racing League's newly-formed 'Road to Indy' will be sharing the same stage. After a decade of confusion about how a driver makes his or her way from the entry level to the starting grid of the Indy 500, the way is now clear: the Cooper Tires Presents USF2000 National Championship Powered by Mazda; the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear; and the Firestone Indy Lights Championship. And all, including the IZOD IndyCars, will be howling around the 1.8-mile, 14-turn course, accelerating like buckshot down a shotgun barrel over the course of the 3-day Honda Grand Prix of St. Petersburg.

And behind the scenes, drivers, teams, engineers, series officials, marketing and PR people, media and all the others associated with the sport will begin the process of making connections, working together and re-invigorating a spectacular form of motorsports competition with a long and storied history. The Star Mazda Championship is the middle rung of this ladder and is now in its 20th year of training and graduating some of the top racers in the world, including such IndyCar stars as Marco Andretti, Graham Rahal and Raphael Matos.

This weekend will be Round 2 of the 11-weekend, 13-race Star Mazda Championship season. Round 1 took place last Friday, prior to the start of the legendary 12 Hours of Sebring and the results give some indication of how competitive Star Mazda races are. One team, Andersen Racing – one of the biggest and most established teams in the series -- set the top three times in all but one qualifying session prior to the race, and qualified 1-2-3 on the grid for the start of the

race. And when the checkered flag fell, it was an Andersen racer, Frenchman Tristan Vautier who, after qualifying third, crossed the finish line first in his #38 Andersen Racing / Moulin TP / Cecibon / Circuit du Laquais Mazda. Vautier is a rookie to U.S. racing but boasts an extensive European open-wheel resume.

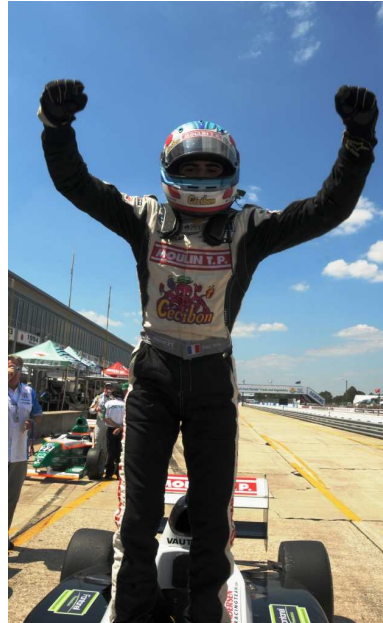
But, finishing an aggressive second after qualifying seventh was Venezuelan driver Jorge Goncalvez, a second-year Star Mazda racer now coming into his own as the driver of the #9 Wabash Capital Investments for Team Apex, a brand-new entrant in the series competing in their first event.

Finishing third after qualifying fourth and leading the first half of the race was American Conor Daly, son of F1/Indy Car legend Derek Daly. Also a second-season driver, Daly races the #22 Juncos Racing / INDECK / College Network / Merchant Services Ltd. / Tom Lange Co. Mazda. Finishing fourth after qualifying on the outside of the front row was Mikael Grenier, a driver who hails from Quebec City and races the #17 Andersen Racing / NAPA Auto Parts / CAA-Quebec/HS Telecom Mazda. And bringing his #47 Andersen Racing / Norse Cutting & Abandonment / Trallfa / Colosseum Mazda home in 5th was Sebring pole-sitter Anders 'The Viking' Krohn, the 2008 F2000 champion who moved up to Star Mazda in 2009 and won a nail-biter on the Milwaukee Mile oval.

So the moral of the story is 'no parades in the Star Mazda Championship.' It's a free-for-all that produces some surprising results, such as Texan Rusty Mitchell, who jumped the standing start ever-so-slightly in his #66 Mitchell Motorsports / Motorola / Petro Comm Mazda, suffered the consequences of a 'drive-through' penalty that dropped him to the back of the field and still managed to race his way back up to 11th by the time the checkered flag fell.

Other story lines that will play out in the streets of St. Petersburg are the three drivers who all won open-wheel championships in 2009 and are now competing in Star Mazda. Connor De Phillippi was the 2009 Skip Barber Pro Series champion and won his drive in the 2010 Star Mazda Championship courtesy of the MAZDAPSEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder, the only automaker-supported program that helps fund champions in a variety of series making the move to the next series up the ladder. He qualified 10th in the #11 JDC Motorsports / MAZDASPEED Motorsports / Skip Barber Mazda and raced his way up to 7th.

Chris Miller won the 2009 F2000 Championship driving for JDC Motorsports and stayed with the team in his move up to Star Mazda and the #85 JDC Motorsports / Miller Milling / Red Line Oil Mazda; he qualified 14th and finished 9th. And, driving for the first-ever Venezuelan-owned



team in the Star Mazda Championship, Carlos Linares, the 2009 Venezuelan F1600 champion, started last in a 23-car field at Sebring and brought his car home in 14th place.

Of local interest are two racers in the field, both from the Tampa/St. Pete area and both sponsored by dental practices. Hayden Duerson, who finished 2nd in the 2009 Skip Barber Pro Series and was both captain of his football team and a national merit scholar last year, will be behind the wheel of the #94 Juncos Racing / Tampa Bay Endodontics Mazda. The other 'home town hero' is racing Tarpon Springs dentist Walt Bowlin (presuming he recovers from his broken collarbone in time) who races the #23 AIM Autosport / Tampa Bay Jaw Surgery Mazda in the Master Series category for driver 45 and older.

The Expert (drivers 30 to 44 years old) and Master Series classes provide the interesting spectacle of successful businessmen, company CEOs and entrepreneurs racing wheel-to-wheel at 160 mph with fearless teenagers. Gerry Kraut won the Master Series class at Sebring driving the #55 JDC Motorsports / Dougherty & Co. / Dougherty Funding LLC Mazda. Kraut, the CEO of Dougherty, is also co-owner of the championship-winning JDC Motorsports team. The winner in the Expert Series (who suffered a mechanical failure on the last lap and had to coast across the finish line at Sebring) is Texan J W Roberts, head of General Data Transfer and owner of Team GDT.

A field of 25 Star Mazda Championship cars is expected at St. Petersburg, and is certain to



produce some of the most exciting racing of the weekend, in no small part because it will be the only one of the open-wheel series utilizing a Formula One-style 'standing start' in which the cars all rev like mad until the green light appears and then drag-race into the first turn... no small spectacle considering these cars accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 2.8 seconds.

On-track action in St. Pete begins with various practice sessions on Friday, March 26. Star Mazda Championship qualifying takes place from 8:50 – 9:35 am Saturday, March 27, with the 45-minute race scheduled to take the green light at 11:50 am Sunday, March 28.

### **About Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear**

For 2010, the Star Mazda Championship presented by Goodyear will feature an 11-weekend, 13-race schedule, most on major race weekends with American Le Mans and the Indy Racing League. Rising stars from around the world will compete for prizes valued at \$1.5 million and benefit from two driver development programs, including the MAZDASPEED Motorsports Driver Development Ladder and the Indy Racing League's 'Road to Indy' program. Series alumni include Indy Car stars Marco Andretti, Graham Rahal and Raphael Matos, rising NASCAR drivers Michael McDowell, Scott

Speed and Colin Braun and prototype racers Dane Cameron and Guy Cosmo. Drivers 16 and older are welcome to compete and the Star Mazda Championship also features Expert (30 to 44) and Master (45 and older) classes for more mature racers. The Star Mazda Championship features standing starts, wheel-to-wheel racing at 150 mph and budgets a fraction of other top open-wheel ladder series. For more information on the Star Mazda Championship please visit [www.starmazda.com](http://www.starmazda.com).

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For more information on the Star Mazda Championship and its drivers, as well as the Mazda Motorsports ladder system, please visit [www.starmazda.com](http://www.starmazda.com) and [www.mazdausa.com](http://www.mazdausa.com). For information, interviews and photos, contact Star Mazda Communications Director Peter Frey at (818) 398-5733 or [StarMazdaPR@aol.com](mailto:StarMazdaPR@aol.com).

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On any given weekend, there are more Mazdas on the road-race tracks of America than any other brand of vehicle. At the track, you'll see MX-5 Miata, RX-8, MAZDA3, MAZDA6, RX-7 and other vintage Mazda models competing, because every Mazda has the Soul of a Sports Car.

For more information on the various Mazda spec series, visit:

[www.usf2000.com](http://www.usf2000.com)

[www.skipbarber.com](http://www.skipbarber.com)

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